



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of Western Ontario
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 2 (Otago), 2019
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Science
Major(s)	Biochemistry

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
Biological Macromolecules	English	BIOC222	18
Human Biochemistry	English	BIOC200	18
Behavioural Genetics	English	GENE200	18
Functional Human Neuroanatomy	English	ANAT242	18

Any comments about these papers?

Western has more internal assignments and group projects than my science papers at Otago. Midterms are also worth the same as finals, one of mine was worth 40%. This makes finals way more chill though because you already have a lot of your final grade, like one of my finals was 25% vs 70% at home.

How did the academic experience/ workload/ style of teaching differ from Otago?

For science papers Western has less of a practical focus than Otago and I found it not as rewarding or effective. There were no labs for my courses except for the anatomy course but these weren't really labs like Otago does, you just filled out a worksheet. Lectures weren't recorded which was a bit annoying if you missed something during the lecture as you just had your notes to rely on. People would record the lectures on their phone. Also, people participate a lot more in lectures than at home which would mean we would sometimes run out of time because of people asking lots of questions.

Accommodation

What accommodation did you stay in? What were the pros and cons of your accommodation?

I stayed at Medway-Sydenham hall (Med-Syd) which is a first-year traditional style hall (at Western they're called residences or Res). The good thing about traditional style was that it was the cheapest option (\$8000 NZD) and super easy to meet people. However, there weren't many exchange students there and it did feel kind of weird at times being back in a first-year building. You'll be put in a single room rather than a double room because you are an upper year. If you choose res, it isn't like Otago where the room comes with everything, I still had to buy sheets, duvet and everything when I got there. I know a lot of people who lived off campus for cheaper and their room came with everything which is helpful, and they still were able to meet heaps of people. Most exchange students living on campus are at Alumni house or London hall which are a bit more expensive but you get your own kitchen etc rather than having to buy the meal plan for traditional style res (your ID card is loaded with \$1500 CAD and you use this to pay for food at res). It's easier to meet exchange students for trips and stuff at these halls but I had no issues with meeting other exchange students, and it was cool to know a lot of Canadians too rather than just exchange students.

Money matters

Please detail your basic costs, e.g. accommodation, flights, visa, food, insurance

I booked with STA travel and got flights + insurance for around \$3500 return. This included a flexi-ticket for my return flight which was really useful as I was unsure about my travel plans so this ticket allowed me to change the date and location of my flight back to NZ, just having to pay the difference of the flight ticket. Accommodation was about \$8000 for the room, laundry, and meal plan. For the visa if you are just doing a one semester exchange you just need to get the eTA tourist visa for \$7 CAD which is super easy to get. If you are staying for more than 6 months, you'll need the Study permit which costs around \$100 CAD. There is a free bus pass for Western students using your ID card, but you have to pay around \$200 CAD for it in your fees. Most things cost basically the same as in NZ, but it's the tax that can confuse you at first as it's not included in the price unlike in NZ, so you'll end up paying more than you think. Same if you go to a restaurant where there is table service because you have to tip 15%. I think the only place where tax isn't added on is at the LCBO, which is the Ontario liquor store.

What means did you use to access your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, Cash passport, foreign bank account, etc.)

Mostly I just used my NZ card to pay for things, there was a 2% fee for this, but it really isn't that noticeable. I also had a Newcomer to Canada account with TD which is a Canadian bank because I worked at a summer camp in Canada before my exchange so had my money from the summer in there. This was useful when doing bank transfers to other Canadians or exchange students who had opened a foreign account. It's up to you whether it's worth it for you.

Visas & Insurance

Did you have to apply for a visa? What was the process?

You just have to fill out a form on the Canadian govt website to apply for the eTA and pay \$7 CAD. It's valid 6 months and all you need for a one semester exchange. The study permit form is a bit lengthier and if you're applying from NZ, you'll need to fly to Auckland to give them your biometrics.

This allows you to work on campus too, but you probably won't have time for that if you're just here for one semester.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

The UHIP is a health insurance plan all international students need to get, its about \$200 CAD and included in your student fees.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organised activities were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

Western's international department runs a weekly event called Global café which is for internationals and the best way to meet other exchange students. We would go every week and it's a great way to catch up and meet new people even halfway through the semester. They also organise a trip to Niagara Falls about 2 weeks into uni. I would recommend going, almost everyone did, and you get around 7 hours free time there to do whatever. They also provide a study space during finals with free food and hot drinks. As I was there in first semester, we had O-week which is not nearly as good as Otago's, and everyone gets the pass and agrees it's a waste of money. A lot of exchange students join the outdoors club which will take you to places like Bruce peninsula, but I ended up never going to any of their events as we organised our own trips.

What was the university/ city like?

Western is really similar to Otago in a lot of ways, especially the social aspect. The campus is really nice (Hogwarts vibes) and much bigger than Otago's but it's really easy to navigate. You get free access to the rec centre which is like Unipol but has a swimming pool and hockey arena in it too. Students have a lot of pride for the uni, and you'll always see everyone wearing Western hoodies which you don't see at Otago. London itself doesn't have much going for it, it's a student town. It's like if Dunedin was put in the middle of fields instead of the beach and was a lot sketchier. For this reason, you'll probably find you'll spend most of your time on campus and only go downtown to go out, as it's not a nice place. However, it's in a great location for travelling, two hours from Detroit and two hours from Toronto.

Any recommendations for things to do, places to visit, places to eat etc.?

London has great student nightlife with something happening basically every night. On Monday and Wednesday nights there is dollar beers and Jack's, the Frog is busy on Fridays and Ceeps is definitely the best bar. Molly Blooms is an Irish bar that does karaoke on Sunday and Monday nights and is fun too. Most restaurants do really good student deals too.

Any tips for future students?

Say yes to everything, get involved at the start of semester and talk to as many people as possible because this is how you'll meet the most people. I know some exchange students at the end who stuck with people from their own country or only a few people and regretted not putting themselves out there more and meeting people from all over the world. Everyone is in the same boat and because you all come from somewhere different, there is always something to talk about!

Overall Experience

Please write one paragraph (or more) about your exchange experience. Please include some photos!

I spent nearly 7 months in Canada, and they were incredible. I don't think I've ever met so many open-minded and amazing people as you do on exchange. Everyone is always down to do anything which makes it so easy to make the most of your time. Before starting my exchange I worked at a summer camp in Nova Scotia for 3 months which was such an awesome experience and something I'd recommend doing, you get to spend more time in the country and also earn some more money, not to mention how rewarding it is. This also gave me places to stay when I travelled to other cities in Canada during the exchange. I spent some time in Vancouver on the way over from NZ and it was my favourite city in Canada.

I would recommend going to Western for first semester, as you get to experience Halloween, Thanksgiving and FOCO which is basically Western's version of Hyde St where 30,000 students come and there is a giant street party. If you're going to res this is even better because it means that nobody knows each other so you're all in the same boat. Plus, it will be really hot and humid in London (30 degrees) until about mid-October, when it will suddenly drop and you'll get heaps of snow (the coldest it got was -13 degrees).

What's good about London is that you can take a 2-hour Greyhound bus and be at Toronto Pearson airport to fly anywhere. Flair, Swoop and Westjet are all cheap airlines that fly around Canada and the US/Mexico. During the semester I travelled to Niagara Falls, Algonquin, Bruce Peninsula, Toronto, Banff and Jasper national parks as well as Ottawa, Montreal and Quebec City. The location of London makes it a great place to travel to any of these places! After exams I went to the states for 10 days, and then Central America after spending Christmas with some exchange students. I managed to do all these things and still come out with good grades which was a bonus, so long as I managed my time well. Next up is Europe for a month before heading back to NZ and reality!

